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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 000021

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR MARBURG, PELLETREAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2019

TAGS: PREL EAID SADC ZI BC

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED: SADC HUMANITARIAN AID TO
ZIMBABWE

REF: STATE 878

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Philip R. Drouin for reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

¶1. (SBU) On January 8, A/DCM Heather Merritt met with Mr. Ernest Mwemutsi, Senior Finance Officer for SADC at the organization's headquarters in Gaborone. Mwemutsi is the "Officer in Charge" at SADC this week, as all other senior officials are out of the country. A/DCM delivered reftel demarche and stressed to Mwemutsi that while the USG commends SADC for its efforts to join the USG and other donors in providing much-needed humanitarian aid to the people of Zimbabwe, we are concerned about the proposal to channel this aid through the parastatal Grain Marketing Board. In order to ensure that all humanitarian assistance remains apolitical and well-coordinated, A/DCM urged SADC to follow the example of member-state Botswana and channel assistance to Zimbabwe through credible nongovernmental entities, including the Red Cross and UN agencies. Mr. Mwemutsi offered no substantive responsive to the demarche, but promised to brief SADC Executive Secretary Salomao on our points at the earliest possible opportunity. He also offered that ES Salomao is in Harare this week "on official business" and would likely return to the office next week. Mwemutsi would not share details about the nature of Salomao's activities in Harare. A/DCM also asked whether Mwemutsi could confirm rumors about a possible SADC Extraordinary Summit to be held later this month. He replied that to his knowledge, no summit has been scheduled but acknowledged that such meetings often happen on short notice "as the need arises."

¶2. (C) Charge d'Affaires and A/DCM also took advantage of an impromptu meeting January 7 with Botswana Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Ambassador Samuel Otlule to discuss this issue with the GOB. Otlule agreed wholeheartedly that SADC assistance should not be channeled through Zimbabwe's Grain Marketing Board. He noted that Botswana's assistance to Zimbabwe was given through the Red Cross and UNICEF, with the exception of one delivery of water treatment chemicals which Botswana provided directly to the GOZ. The GOB tried to avoid providing any of its assistance directly to the government, but decided that water treatment chemicals were an important public good and that clean municipal drinking water could not easily be politicized. Otlule was on annual leave, but promised to pass our information to his colleagues in the MFA for follow-up with SADC as appropriate.

¶3. (C) Charge and A/DCM also shared the contents of reftel demarche with UK High Commissioner Frank Martin during a January 7 meeting in his office in Gaborone. Martin was not aware of SADC's plans to provide assistance to Zimbabwe via the GMB, but agreed with the U.S. position against such a move.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: It is difficult to gauge SADC's reaction to

our demarche as the more senior officials are not in country this week and Mr. Mwemutsi was clearly out of his depth discussing Zimbabwe policy. It is also unclear whether SADC has truly thought through the proposed ZHDAF. A/DCM asked Mwemutsi how the \$30 million assistance program would be funded, and he thought that some of the money would be pledged by SADC member states, while another part may be solicited from the donor community. Ambassador Otlule complained that SADC frequently fails to coordinate proposals like the ZHDAF one with member states, and he suggested that one or two interested countries, like South Africa, could push this kind of program through without fully consulting all members. Post will follow up with both the GOB and SADC on this issue, as and when key officials return from festive season leave, and report any further developments septel.

End Comment.

DROUIN